



Compulsive Hoarding

What is Compulsive Hoarding?

Compulsive hoarding is when a person collects and keeps an overabundance of items, which may often appear useless or of little value to most people. These items clutter the living spaces of the home and prevent the person from using their rooms as they were intended. Most often, people hoard common possessions, such as paper (e.g. mail, newspapers), books, clothing, and containers (e.g. boxes, paper and plastic bags). Others may accumulate multiples of the same items (appliances). Some people hoard garbage or rotten food. More rarely, people hoard animals or human waste products.



Who struggles with hoarding behavior?

Most people who hoard have been struggling with this problem all of their adult lives. Typically, compulsive hoarding begins with some clutter and difficulty discarding, but then progresses over time until it becomes unmanageable and overwhelming. Most people who hoard are older adults, with an average age of 50, although hoarding behaviors can begin as early as the teenage years. Persons who hoard tend to live alone and often have a family member with the problem. About 2 to 5% of the population have a serious hoarding problem.

Signs of Compulsive Hoarding:

- Difficulty getting rid of or organizing items.
- A large amount of clutter that makes it difficult to use furniture or move around the home.
- Losing important items like money or bills in the clutter.
- Unusually strong positive feelings (joy, delight) when getting new items or unusually strong negative feelings (guilt, anger, fear) when considering getting rid of items.
- Strong beliefs that items are valuable or may be useful some time in the future, even when other people do not want them.
- Denial of a problem even when the clutter clearly interferes with a person's life and safety.

The Dangers of Hoarding

- Severe clutter threatens the health and safety of those living in or near the home and can lead to unsanitary conditions.
- In addition to health problems, hoarding can cause structural damage to the home, fires, and even death.
- Firefighters, Police Officers, and EMTs may not be able to gain access to a person in an emergency situation.
- Hoarding can represent a violation of the State Sanitary (Housing) Code, even in a private home, and can result in an order from the Board of Health to remove materials or organize clutter within a specific time frame.
- Expensive and emotionally devastating evictions or other court actions can lead to hospitalization or homelessness
- Conflict with family members can occur and friends become frustrated and concerned about the state of the home and the hoarding behaviors.

Is there help for those who hoard?

Treatment options include harm reduction and/or cognitive-behavior therapy or other support services. Whatever treatment one chooses to use, it is important to realize that clutter is the result of hoarding behavior. Therefore, clearing out the home of the person who hoards does not solve the underlying problematic hoarding and cluttering behavior.

How Can I Help a Hoarding Friend or Family Member?

- Attempts by family or friends to help with the decluttering may not be well-received by the person who hoards.
- Keep in mind that until the person is motivated to change, they may not accept an offer to help.
- Motivation cannot be forced.
- Everyone, including people who hoard, has a right to make choices about their objects and about how they live.
- Attempting to clean out the homes of people who hoard without treating the underlying problem usually fails.
- Hoarders whose homes are cleaned without their consent often experience extreme distress and may become further attached to their possessions. This may lead to their refusal of future help and cause them to isolate themselves from friends and family.
- Focus the intervention initially on safety. Unblock doors, windows, and heating vents and remove trash that is attracting pests. Eliminate fall and fire risks.



If Your Friend Or Family Member Is Ready
To Talk About Hoarding...

Show Respect. Acknowledge that the person has a right to make their own decisions at their own pace.

Be Patient. Try to understand that their items are important to them.

Encourage. Come up with ideas to make their home safer.

Team Up With Them. Don't argue about what to discard; instead, find out what will help motivate the person to discard or organize.

Reflect. Help the person recognize that hoarding interferes with their goals or values.

Ask. To help develop trust, never throw anything away without first asking permission.

Seek Professional Assistance. Find a doctor or clinician who can help. The problem will not go away by itself. Look for a support group.

Town of Bedford Hoarding Task Force

Meets monthly and includes Police, Fire, Health, Council on Aging, Youth & Family Services, and Eliot representatives who work collaboratively on specific hoarding cases for successful intervention and outcomes.

12 Mudge Way, Bedford MA 01730

Phone: 781/275-6825

Fax: 781/275-5673

www.bedfordma.gov/hoarding

Resources

Bedford Board of Health 781/275-6507

Bedford Council on Aging (COA) 781/275-6825

Bedford Youth & Family Services (YFS)
781/275-7727

Eliot Community Human Services 978/369-1113

Minuteman Senior Services 781/272-7177

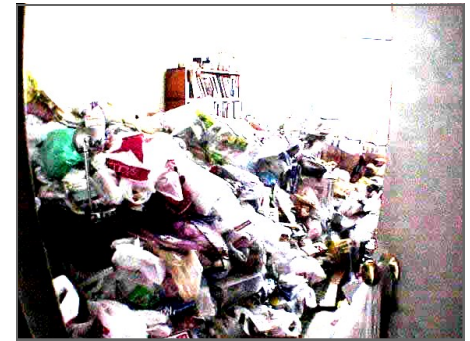
Metropolitan Boston Housing Partnership/
Hoarding & Sanitation Initiative 617/425-6789

Servpro 1/888-762-4185

www.masshousing.com/hoarding

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Town of Bedford



We all have

...things we hold on to, even if they're no longer useful. Sometimes they represent a special memory. Sometimes we think they'll eventually come in handy. And sometimes we can't say why, but it is difficult to throw them away.

